

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 1712

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, TC, MU
SUBJECT: TERRITORIAL DISPUTE BETWEEN OMAN AND RAS AL-KHAIMAH

REF ABU DHABI 3316 AND PREVIOUS

1. SUMMARY: IN DISCUSSION NOVEMBER 29, FOREIGN MINISTRY'S CHIEF OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS, SADEK SULAIMAN, CONFIRMED THAT OMANGOV CLAIMS TERRITORY ALONG WESTERN MUSANDAM COAST DOWN TO POINT JUST SOUTH OF RAMS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT JULIAN WALKER MAP PUTS THIS AREA IN RAS AL-KHAIMAH. OMANI CLAIM REJECTS WALKER BOUNDARY AND GOES BACK TO TRIBAL AFFILIATIONS IN REGION. SULAIMAN BELIEVED DISPUTE WOULD BE SETTLED BY NEGOTIATIONS DUE TO START THIS MONTH. END SUMMARY.

2. DCM RECEIVED BRIEFING NOVEMBER 29 FROM SADEK SULAIMAN, CHIEF OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS IN FOREIGN MINISTRY, ON OMANGOV
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VIEW OF BORDER CONTROVERSY WITH RAS AL-KHAIMAH. BRIEFING WAS AT OUR REQUEST. DCM STRESSED THAT USG HAS NO INTENTION OF GETTING INVOLVED BUT WANTS TO BE CORRECTLY INFORMED.

3. SULAIMAN BASED BRIEFING ON A FEBRUARY 1963 BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT MAP THAT CAME FROM JULIAN WALKER'S FINDINGS. HOWEVER, SULAIMAN IGNORED BOUNDARY ON MAP AND

SAID OMAN BELIEVES ITSELF ENTITLED TO A LARGE SLICE OF LAND ALONG WESTERN MUSANDAM COAST WHICH WALKER CLEARLY PUT IN RAS AL-KHAIMAH. CONFIRMING INFO FROM UAE SOURCES (MOST RECENTLY REFTEL), HE DECLARED THAT OMAN CLAIMS DOWN TO JUST SOUTH OF SRAMS. IN OMANGOV'S OPINION, THE BORDER SHOULD RUN FROM A POINT ON THE COAST IMMEDIATELY SOUTH OF RAMS ROUGHLY EASTWARD TO WHERE IT HITS WALKER'S BOUNDARY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MUSANDAM PENINSULA.

4. A PENCILED CIRCLE ON HIS MAP OFF WESTERN MUSANDAM COAST INDICATED LOCATION OF OIL RIG WHICH IS THE CENTER OF CURRENT CONTROVERSY. CIRCLE WAS CLEARLY ON RAS AL-KHAIMAH SIDE OF WALKER'S BOUNDARY, THOUGH IT WAS CLOSE TO THE LINE. SULAIMAN INDICATED THAT OMAN'S OBJECTION TO THE RIG IS BASED SOLELY ON OMANI CLAIM TO SHORELINE DOWN TO RAMS.

5. SULAIMAN DENIED THERE HAVE BEEN CLASHES ALONG THE DISPUTED BORDER IN RECENT WEEKS. HE SAID IT IS OMANGOV POLICY TO AVOID INCIDENTS.

6. SULAIMAN PRESENTED OMANI CASE WITHOUT ANY HINT OF DEFENSIVENESS. HE GAVE AS MORAL JUSTIFICATION THE PRESENCE OF SHUHUH TRIBESMEN IN DISPUTED AREA. THESE ARE SAME TRIBES THAT ARE FOUND ON OMANI SIDE OF WALKER'S BOUNDARY, HE NOTED, AND "EVERYONE KNOWS" THEY ARE OMANI TRIBES. THEY HAVE LONG COMPLAINED THAT MUSCAT AUTHORITIES DID NOTHING TO PROTECT

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THEIR LAND FROM RAS AL-KHAIMAH'S GRADUAL ENCROACHMENTS, WHICH STARTED MANY DECADES AGO. SULTAN QABOOS HAS TRIED TO GET UAE PRESIDENT ZAYID TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON THIS MATTER SEVERAL TIMES IN LATE FEW YEARS, WITHOUT SUCCESS UNTIL A TEST FLAREUP SEEMED TO DO THE TRICK.

7. EXPANDING ON ENCROACHMENT THEME, SULAIMAN SAID WHOLE MUSANDAM AREA ONCE WAS OMANI AND COULD BE CONSIDERED PART OF OMAN. LOCAL SHEIKHS HAVE GRABBED BITS OF TERRITORY FROM THE SULTANATE OVER THE PAST DECADES, SULAIMAN COMPLAINED, WITH THE RESULT THAT THE MAP NOW LOOKS LIKE A PATCHWORK QUILT. ACCORDING TO SULAIMAN, WALKER'S MAP MERELY RECORDED THIS SCENE AS OF THE TIME WALKER COLLECTED HIS DATA AND HAS NO SPECIAL LEGALITY. HE NOTED THAT SULTAN SAID BIN TAIMUR EXPLICITLY REJECTED THE WALKER MAP WHEN IT FIRST APPEARED AS FAR AS THE AREA NOW IN DISPUTE IS CONCERNED. SULAIMAN IMPLIED THERE ARE OTHER AREAS WHERE THE OMANGOV COULD CONCEIVABLY RAISE A CLAIM, BUT HE ADDED RATHER VAGUELY THAT IT DOES NOT INTEND TO DO SO.

8. SULAIMAN WAS HOPEFUL THAT THE DISPUTE WOULD BE SETTLED BY NEGOTIATIONS, SCHEDULED TO BEGIN THIS MONTH. HE STATED

REASON FOR OPTIMISM WAS NOT RPT NOT THAT EACH SIDE SEEMED
READY TO GIVE AND TAKE BUT HE ZAYID AT LONG LAST SEEMED
DISPOSED TO SEE RIGHTNESS OF OMANI VIEW. SULAIMAN INDICATED
NO FLEXIBILITY ON OMANI SIDE.

9. COMMENT: DESPITE HIS UNABASHED PORTRAYAL OF THIS CLAIM,
SULAIMAN MUST HAVE KNOWN IT HAS LITTLE CHANCE OF SUCCESS. WE
SUSPECT IT IS MOTIVATED BY TWO OMANGOV CONCERNS: FIRST, WE
DETECT A GENUINELY HELD OMANGOV FEAR OF "ENCROACHMENTS" PAST
AND FUTURE ON OMAN'S MUSADAM TERRITORY, WHICH LIES ISOLATED
FROM MAIN BODY OF OMAN AND IS SURROUNDED BY RICHER AND MORE
PROSPEROUS UAE. OMANGOV MAY BE FOLLOWING THEORY THAT A
VIGOROUS OFFENSE MAKES THE BEST DEFENSE. SECONDLY, WE
NOTE THAT CURRENT FLURRY WAS SET OFF BY OFFSHORE OIL RIG VERY
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NEAR THE WALKER BOUNDARY. THUS (THOUGH SULAIMAN AT NO TIME
SUGGESTED THIS) OMANGOV MAY HAVE FALL-BACK CLAIM RELATING
TO IMMEDIATE AREA OF WALKER LINE. THIS CLAIM WOULD PROB-
ABLY BE MORE TENACIOUSLY HELD THAN LARGER ONE, BECAUSE OF
OIL PROJECTS OFFSHORE. EVEN THOUGH SUCH PROSPECTS MAY BE
RELATIVELY MEAGER, OMANGOV'S PRESENT FRUSTRATION OVER ITS
OWN OIL-PRODUCING FUTURE MAKES ANY POSSIBILITY OF OIL DOUBLY AT-
TRACTIVE. WOLLE

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